

Masami Teraoka

Tattooed Woman at Sunset Beach II

Magnolia Editions is pleased to announce its second tapestry edition by Masami Teraoka, a Japanese-born, Hawaii-based artist whose work employs a mastery of traditional *Ukiyo-e* styles and iconography to consider contemporary issues, creating what the artist calls a “cross-epoch conversation.” *Tattooed Woman on Sunset Beach II* finds the artist revisiting *Tattooed Woman on Sunset Beach*, an intimate 1984 watercolor measuring only fourteen by ten inches. Over the course of two years, Teraoka worked with Donald Farnsworth to create a digital weave file based on the painting, carefully reworking his composition and introducing new elements to arrive at a monumental tapestry edition nearly ten feet high and six feet across.



Tattooed Woman at Sunset Beach II, 2013
Jacquard tapestry, 115 x 76 in. Edition of 8

The decorated subject of Teraoka’s *Tattooed Woman* is a pearl diver, one of several iconic heroines who have repeatedly appeared in the painter’s work since the 1970s. In a 2006 essay, Alison Bing explains the historical significance of this self-sufficient and fearless female protagonist:

[The pearl diver was] the archetypal liberated woman of the Edo period who became the focus of many seafaring tales and urban myths. According to these accounts, women pearl divers were more than the equal of their earthbound male peers: they performed impressive feats of physical prowess, earned their own livings, and sidestepped social conventions. Not only did pearl divers eschew the heavy kimonos and elaborate hairdos women of the day were expected to wear, but these women performed their profession scandalously scantily clad. Since abalone, oysters, and the pearls they contain were also useful symbols for female genitalia during periods of official censorship, pearl divers became

a kind of shorthand for sexual liberation. [...] In her many manifestations, [Teraoka’s pearl diver] inspires vivid fantasies about what it would be like to be so utterly free of convention, clothing, and constraint.

Our heroine’s free-spirited, independent nature is underscored by her extraordinary, full-body dragon tattoos; Teraoka has noted that in the 1970s, tattooing in Japan was “still considered a lower-class macho symbol, traditionally practised among *yakuza* (gangsters) and construction workers” – though by 1984, he says, “no one seemed to think twice about tattoos in America and perhaps in Japan as well.” In spite of her delicate beauty, the *Tattooed Woman* is covered with dragons, a symbol long associated in the East with powerful bodies of water and a popular tattoo motif among Japanese

yakuza, further emphasizing her tough, outsider status. Teraoka explains that the red granules between her legs are a kind of fish food sold at Hanauma Bay, a popular snorkeling destination in Hawaii.

The artist often refers to his work as “narrative art theater,” combining the highly theatrical gestures and symbolism of traditional *Ukiyo-e* prints with a contemporary film director’s canny sense of staging and spectacle. Many of his works can be seen as a single still or frame from an imaginary movie – or in the case of the *Tattooed Woman* tapestry, he suggests, perhaps an episode of the most fascinating reality show you’ve (never) seen, set at Hanauma Bay. Teraoka’s ‘pitch’ for this show is hard to resist:

Just seeing a young Japanese woman covered head-to-toe in tra-

ditional dragon tattoos at Hanauma Bay would be an astonishing sight... but what if there were a Giant Abalone Miss Hawaii Contest, sponsored by a Japanese magazine publisher and an abalone producer from the Big Island? It could be a reality show: a dozen traditionally tattooed women from Japan would ascend the stage in high heels. The newly inaugurated Pope Francis could fly in from the Vatican in Rome to judge the contest, and administer kisses to the feet of each contestant in deference to the painful high heels; the tough but sweet-looking Japanese women would surely melt from Pope Francis's kisses. An NHK producer from Tokyo, the directors of the Mori Art Museum and the Honolulu Museum of Art, and other international museum heads could all serve as guest judges, while music could be provided by geisha playing traditional Japanese drums and shamisen.

Writing in 1979, Howard Link notes that “Teraoka blends a degree of wisdom with much absurdity in a consciously chosen art style that lends itself to keen wit, nuances of hidden meaning (often erotic and salacious), twists of earthy humor and a great deal of sheer beauty.” The *Tattooed Woman at Sunset Beach II* tapestry edition brings the exceptional creativity, prescient social insight, and technical mastery of this artist to bear in an extremely difficult medium, setting a new standard for Jacquard weaving’s potential to depict even the visions of an imagination as extraordinary as Teraoka’s. ■